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The Yoga of Sage Vasishtha

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



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The Yoga of Sage Vasishtha



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The Yoga of Sage Vasishtha

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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Dedication tip-on

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The Despondency of Sri Rama

24 March 2012

Yoga Vasishtha is a treatise on yoga wherein the great sage Vasishtha teaches the principles of Vedanta to his pupil, Sri Rama. It is not intended for the wholly worldly-minded person, nor for the liberated sage. Rather, it is intended for the inspiration and upliftment of the spiritual seeker who longs to attain freedom.

The character of Sri Rama

This satsang series falls during the period of Chaitra Navaratri, a nine-day period of worship. It is dedicated to the Cosmic Shakti who is known as Adi Shakti in her many forms, and to Sri Rama, who represents the perfect individual. This is a very beautiful concept of tantra. On the one hand, we are invoking the grace of Shakti, the cosmic power, the feminine power, the power of creation. On the other, we are invoking the grace of Sri Rama, who represents the *purusha tattwa*, the masculine principle and the awakened consciousness; the perfectly balanced individual. Shakti represents Prakriti, nature and energy, and Sri Rama represents Purusha, consciousness. Devi is the Cosmic Mother from whom everything has come forth and Sri Rama represents the balance of the cosmos.

What was the character of Sri Rama? He is known as *maryada purushottam*, which means the best person. It indicates perfect equilibrium. There is no overstepping of

the boundaries, or any encroachment on another's area, but remaining instead within appropriate boundaries and the defined area. This equilibrium is between life, nature and the divine. It indicates a person who is in perfect tune and harmony with the cosmic will and the dharma of human life. There is no conflict or confusion. Rather, he knows the parameters of appropriateness, and lives and functions within those parameters for the welfare of all. That was the character of Rama, perfect equilibrium.

Devi represents the cosmic power of creation and internal transformation. With the invocation of the three Shaktis: Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati, we attain the contentment which comes with freedom from strife, peace in the dynamic life, wisdom and knowledge. The result is a connection with everything, and then the state of equilibrium dawns. This has to be our focus: equilibrium in life and internal transformation.

The story of Dasharatha

The story of the subject of *Yoga Vasishtha* begins in an age long-past. During that time, there was an affluent kingdom ruled by a king who was very pious, generous and great. His name was Dasharatha. King Dasharatha had perfect mastery over his senses and mind. This is reflected in his name, *Dasharatha*, which means one who controls ten chariots, or ten horses. *Dasha* means ten and *ratha* means chariot. Thus, Dasharatha is one who can control ten chariots at the same time.

If you look at your own life, you will see that you also have ten chariots, otherwise known as the senses: the five senses of action and the five senses of cognition. The senses are usually moving out towards the mundane, material and sensorial dimension. As the senses become more active in the outer dimension, dissipation and distraction of the nature, the mind, and of the intellect takes place. If you allow the dissipation and distraction to govern your nature, ultimately destruction of life comes about. Therefore, it is the attempt



of every spiritual tradition in the world to first realize one's self, and know how to attain the state of equilibrium and restraint in life, before attempting to go further in the experience of the Higher Self. King Dasharatha was the master of his senses. It was with this perfect mastery over the senses and perfect equilibrium in his life that he ruled his kingdom. Unfortunately, however, he did not have any heir to his throne.

He married and tried to produce an heir, but he was not successful. He married a second time; yet again he did not have any offspring. He married a third time, but he remained unsuccessful. In fact, he never would have been successful, no matter how many times he married, because he was the master of his senses. How could he be successful in procreation? Procreation is a process which requires one to let go of the control over the senses and induce a passionate state of mind and body. That passion disturbs the mental peace. A person who is living a balanced and equipoised life cannot allow such passions to deviate and distract the senses and lose the control that has been gained. Therefore, King Dasharatha was not successful in producing any offspring.

Somebody advised him that the spiritual power of the rishis and sannyasins could invoke a special soul. The entire court wondered who could be such a rishi or sannyasin with the power and siddhi to invoke a special soul to take birth in this material life. They found such a person in Bihar, named Shringi Rishi. The location of his ashram is about four or five kilometres from Ganga Darshan, so he is our neighbour. This brilliant and powerful rishi was called to the kingdom of Ayodhya. *Ayodhya* means ‘the kingdom which cannot be conquered.’ Everyone is satisfied and happy; there is no craving, no desire, and no expectation. There is only peace, happiness and contentment. How can a kingdom under such tight reign and restraint be conquered? Who will attack this kingdom and who will it attack? Nobody. Dasharatha was a self-restrained man, the king who reigned over this peaceful kingdom which could not be conquered.

Prasad of Agni Devata

Shringi Rishi came to Ayodhya and performed austerities of invocation. At the conclusion of the austerities, the god of fire, Agni, emerged from the *yajna kunda*, the fire pit. The god of fire is prana shakti, which is responsible for the creation, maintenance and sustenance of life. Without prana shakti, you would not live. If the manipura fire in your body diminishes or is put out, you will cease to exist due to the absence of prana. Prana is fire, agni. With the invocation of Rishi Shringi, *prana*, the vital force, the life force, appeared in human form as Agni Devata. He gave a dish of *kheer*, rice pudding, to the king and said, “Give this prasada to your queens and they will bear you offspring.” Thus, when the spiritual power of the rishi invoked the cosmic prana shakti and manifested as Agni Devata, it gave the boon, “You shall have offspring.” The boon was given to Dasharatha, the self-restrained, equipoised emperor.

The prasada of Agni Devata, consumed by the three queens, was the power to create life, as prana shakti creates life. Four princes were born and they were named Rama,

Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. They were not ordinary people; they were not ordinary princes, because they were not born of ordinary parents. The princes were born of parents who were disciplined, who had virtually no enemy anywhere in the world. They were born of parents who were peaceful, without desires or expectations. Therefore, the samskaras in them were totally different from regular people. You cannot be like the parents of Sri Rama because there is very little restraint in your life. You are searching for grace, you long for grace, but all the windows and doors to allow the grace to come in are closed, due to the dissipation and distraction of your mind and senses. That is why grace does not descend in your life.

Special samskaras of special offspring

The four princes were born with special samskaras and qualities. Imagine the samskaras of the offspring of a king who is totally equipoised, who is in total sanyam of his being. What kind of offspring would be born with the grace of Agni Devata, the cosmic prana shakti? They would not be normal human beings. History called them *avatars*, incarnations of the divine. Today Sri Rama is considered an avatara, an incarnation of the cosmic power, a boy born with special attributes.

The yogic tradition says that you move through different stages and conditions in life to supplement and purify your nature, mind and emotions, and to connect them with the state of sattwa. That is known as progression and evolution. You have to move from *tamas*, inertia; to *rajas*, activity; to *sattwa*, luminosity. You have to struggle with yourself, manage your head-trips and heart-trips. You have to struggle with yourself to find a balance in your environment, with your friends and family. You have to confront strife, tensions, anxieties and frustrations. You are in the state of tamas, but a person who is fully restrained and established in sanyam, will not encounter any tamas in life. Such a person will be established in the state of sattwa.

Influence of sattwa

The nature, perception and behaviour of a person established in sattwa are different. We have seen the example of Sri Swamiji. His traits, his character, his nature, his way of thinking and acting are something that none of us have. There is no compatibility at all. There is a certain nature, character, trait and samskara. In the same manner, Sri Rama was born out of sattwa and was endowed with the qualities of sattwa.

Tradition says that as you acquire more and more sattwic qualities, you transform yourself, become more transcendental, and can eventually be labelled 'divine'. When you move in the dimension of sattwa, you are separate from the tamasic influences of life, the senses and the world, and you are able to manage your rajasic behaviour, mind, thinking and expression. Tamas and rajas cease to have any influence at all in your life and the qualities of sattwa emerge.

They say that in Sri Rama's life there were twelve qualities of sattwa. In Krishna's life there were sixteen qualities of sattwa and in Buddha's life there were four qualities of sattwa. They say in the lives of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda there are four qualities of sattwa. When the quality of sattwa enters your life, you become different from those who are subject to the influence of rajas and tamas. It is this quality of sattwa which makes a person a saint, a siddha or an avatara.

When you are born, you are a regular person, with the same mind and the same senses to interact with the world. However, as you grow up and the nature and character of your personality evolve and develop different traits, samskaras and behaviours are expressed and observed. They identify you as different. The sannyasins, sadhus and realized beings possess up to four qualities of sattwa. The siddhas have four qualities of sattwa. Some other people might have five, six, seven, eight, twelve or sixteen qualities of sattwa. All these different attainments make you realize your higher nature



and higher potentials. God is the source of infinite sattwic qualities, and so He is transcendental. Therefore, the position of God is always above everybody else. He is the creator, observer, seer and actor of everything that is perceivable and non-perceivable. Consequently, when these qualities manifest in human life in behaviours and expressions, the person becomes an avatara. Those who have more than ten qualities of sattwa become an avatara. Sri Rama had twelve, he is called an avatara; Krishna had sixteen, he is called an avatara.

When Sri Rama was born, he was an ordinary human boy, but his genius trait began to manifest over time. He went to his guru's ashram to study at the age of eight. It is mentioned in the *Ramayana*: *Alpa kala mai vidya paye* – “In the shortest

time possible, he knew everything.” According to history, Sri Rama spent time in his guru Vasishtha’s ashram from the age of eight to the age of fourteen. That is six years. Tradition says that you have to spend twelve years in learning at the guru’s ashram, but Sri Rama completed his syllabus of study in six years.

By the time he was fourteen, he knew everything that the guru had to teach about society, kingdom, ruling, governance, spiritual life, mysticism, occultism, and so on. That was possible due to his *samskaras*. You also have *samskaras* and you are also exposed to learning. You learn, but how much do you imbibe? How much effort do you make to change yourself? Zero percent. Therefore, all your knowledge is bookish and never becomes an experience. However, in the case of Sri Rama, he lived, he imbibed, he realized. After completing his education in the guru’s ashram, he returned to his kingdom.

Sri Rama’s despondency

In the social environment of that bygone age, there were little pockets of civilizations; no transport, motorcycles, cars or planes. People had to travel from one place to another in chariots. There were no distractions, no television or books, only *shruti*, learning through hearing. After the required time for governance was over, what could the princes do? In order to entertain themselves, they went out hunting with friends or they would play *chaupad*, a game like backgammon. There were very few distractions in those days and lots of spare time. So what to do with this young prince, who was too young to take on the responsibilities of the kingdom, and too bored to stay at home doing nothing?

King Dasharatha said, “Go to all the places of pilgrimage in our kingdom.” Sri Rama went with his retinue, visiting places of pilgrimage, visiting different *sadhus* and *sannyasins*, spending time with them just like you travel the world and wander here and there. In the same manner, Sri Rama travelled, and had meetings with the intellectuals of that

time and the spiritual personalities of that time and learned from them. After the pilgrimage was over, he came back to Ayodhya, the kingdom of his father. When he returned, he started to live in isolation. He stopped meeting with people. He started thinking and thinking. He did not have any interest in the wealth of the kingdom, in meeting with people and making small talk or in overstuffing himself with good food. He was satisfied with whatever was there. He did not make any demands on his parents or even ask those in charge of the kitchen, "Make this for me today."

When the courtiers saw this change in the attitude and behaviour of Sri Rama, they went and informed the king, Dasharatha. They said, "Sir, your son, the prince, shows no interest in the affairs of the kingdom. He shows no interest in games and girls. He likes to spend his time in isolation, thinking all the time; about what, we do not know. He does not speak to anybody. We feel that he has gone into a state of depression."

When the king heard the word 'depression', he became very anxious. He said, "How is it possible that a boy of sixteen goes into a state of depression? This is the time when he should jump, laugh and dance with joy. This is the time when he should interact with everybody. What has happened to his mood?" While the father was thinking in this manner, a sage entered the palace. His name was Vishwamitra, and he had come to ask the king to protect his hermitage from the demons and terrorists who were terrorizing the area. Vishwamitra overheard what the courtiers were saying to the king, and he suddenly made a plan. He said to himself, "For Rama to become extroverted again, I will take him. I will engage him."

When Sage Vishwamitra met King Dasharatha, the king said "What can I do for you?" Sage Vishwamitra replied, "Give me Rama. He will come with me to my hermitage and protect my hermitage and sannyasins from the demonical beings that terrorize the area." The king said, "How is that possible? Rama is only a boy. Furthermore, he is in a state



of depression and dejection, he has no interest in doing anything. I can send my generals and armies with you to protect your hermitage and destroy the demons. They are well-versed in the art of war and combat, whether hand-to-hand or with arms. Rama is only a child, how can he fight the army of demons? Besides, he is in a state of depression. He may not even raise his head to look at them.”

Sage Vishwamitra went to Guru Vasishtha and said, “Please ensure that Rama comes with me.” Vasishtha called Sri Rama. The message was sent, “You are to appear before your father the king, your guru, Sage Vasishtha, and the respected elder who has come, Sage Vishwamitra.”

Sri Rama went to the hall where the three were seated, and his father, King Dasharatha, asked him, “Why are you not happy? Why are you so dejected? Why are you not showing any interest in life? What is your problem? Do you need more companions and girlfriends to entertain you? Do you need more wealth to keep you happy? More rubies and diamonds? Do you need more horses, chariots and elephants

to play with?” Sri Rama said, “No, I have no interest in any of these things. I don’t see any need for them. For me, they are worthless, temporary objects of engagement. In fact, I feel this whole world is illusory. It is only a temporary engagement with people, and I do not understand the nature of the world. I do not understand what the aim of human life in this world is.”

Remember, this Rama is not you or your offspring. The Rama making these statements is a genius with very special traits and characters. He also has all his horses under control, for he is the son of Dasharatha.

Dashaanana vs. Dasharatha

Let us leave this line of thought for a moment and introduce another side, a counterpoint. There is another king who is totally unrestrained. He is so destructive, distracted and dissipated that everyone fears him. His name is Dashaanana, better known as Ravana. *Dasha* again means ten and *aanana* means face; therefore, *Dashaanana* means a person with ten faces. Symbolically, each face is interacting with the world; each sense organ is interacting with the world of objects through craving, desiring and acquiring. There is no restraint whatsoever. The focus is on increasing wealth, expanding the kingdom, controlling, dominating and governing other kingdoms, indicating all external traits. Dashaanana’s son is *Meghanada*; the word means one who thunders. *Megha* means cloud and *nada* means sound. When you desire something and don’t get it, you also make the sound of thunder. You are also Meghanada. When you are agitated and angry, the sound of thunder comes out from you.

You are the offspring of Dashanaana, not Dasharatha. That is the truth. All your senses are connected with the world; each sense organ is interacting intensely with the world. When your ambitions, expectations and desires are not fulfilled, the thunder of aggressiveness manifests through speech, mind, eyes and even the hair. The hairs stand on end and the whole body becomes electrical, like lightning. This is the exact opposite of Dasharatha and Sri Rama. Later,

the two different personalities of Dashaanana and Sri Rama have to fight each other and ultimately, Sri Rama vanquishes Dashaanana and also Meghanada. I am telling you this to indicate the difference between one who is self-contained and one who is connected with the senses.

Vasishtha's intervention

Coming back to the story of Rama, when Sri Rama said to his father, "I have no interest in life", Guru Vasishtha said, "What do you mean, you have no interest in life? That is not what I have taught you. I have taught you to live your dharma, have you forgotten that lesson?"

Sri Rama said, "No, I have not forgotten my lesson, but I am a bit confused. Should I follow my dharma to attain eternal happiness or follow my dharma to please somebody for a temporary gain? If I follow my dharma for my own or somebody else's sake, then I am negating my real dharma. I am diverting myself for my sake or for somebody else's sake, whether my father's or my mother's, and this will not satisfy me because I know that I have a different dharma. That is where my confusion lies. You have taught me the dharma of life and you have taught me the dharma of a prince, a king, a husband, a son, a warrior and a realized being. My nature does not take me to life and the world, my nature is to shun the world and remain in isolation."

The problems of Sri Rama

Sage Vasishtha further questioned Sri Rama, "How do you know that you are not inclined to the world?" Sri Rama replied "To begin with, when I look at the world, I see the absence of happiness everywhere. That is my first problem." He then gave Sage Vasishtha a long list of his problems:

Absence of happiness: Sri Rama said, "I do not see happiness anywhere. I see the absence of happiness in society, in family, in my life. Where do I find happiness and contentment? Whatever I try to connect with ultimately causes unhappiness and dissatisfaction."

Blindness of delusion: “My second problem is the blindness of delusion. If I go in one direction I am blinded by that situation. I am deluded; I identify with that which is not permanent. You have taught me to not become attached to things which are non-permanent; I should try to search for that which is permanent in life. I see everybody blinded by their delusion. Who is able to see what is permanent in this impermanent life?”

Fickleness of mind: “The third problem that I find is fickleness of the mind. If I release the reigns of my mind, it runs wild. It begins to desire something one moment, another thing the next moment, and so on. This is not only my problem, but I see such fickleness in each and every citizen of the kingdom. I believe it is a common trait. If this fickleness of mind will not allow one to become stable in life, how does one attain *shanti*, peace?”

Fire of desires: “The fourth problem is the fire of desires and passions that burn the body and the mind. How can I control the desires which are burning me from inside? How can I pacify them? How can I control, channel or guide my own *vasanas*, desires? If I can guide my own *vasanas* I can also tell other people how to guide and restrain their own *vasanas*.”

Disgust with the body: “Another problem of mine is that I don’t like this body, composed of flesh, fat, bones and blood. It is very unpleasant. It emits foul odours. Sometimes it is sick and cannot perform any action. Sometimes there is depletion of energy; there is no motivation, inspiration or *karma shakti*, power of action. Although I have received this body as the instrument through which I live and survive in this world, I find it unpleasant. Sickness, ill health, old age and death indicate the impermanent state of the body. It is full of faults, difficulties, problems and illnesses.”

Defects of childhood and youth: “Another problem is immaturity: the defects of childhood and of youth, such as immature understanding, irrational behaviour, actions that are not thought out, aggressive implementation to fulfil

one's desire. Young people don't seem to care for anything; they only pursue what they want in life, regardless of what others are feeling. These are the defects of youth; there is no consideration, kindness or sympathy, only fixating on one's own ambitions in life. In this state, the mind is disturbed and creativity is suppressed."

Insipidity of enjoyment: "Insipidity of enjoyment is another problem of mine. After enjoying something once, the mind does not experience the same type of enjoyment again with the same item." When you see a movie, the first time you are glued to the screen because it is something new. The next time you know the plot, therefore, it doesn't hold any interest for you; you just sit there for the sake of company, as someone has asked you to see the movie with them, but you are not interested.

Disgust for old age: "I also have this incredible disgust for old age. All the powers of youth disappear. I don't want to become old and unable to run or walk straight, having to take the support of a stick; I will not be able to see anything due to cataract or hear anything due to hearing defects; I will not even be able to eat because there will be no teeth. These are the defects of old age that we all have to face, yet I see people clinging to life. They are not willing to let go of their life, even though they are suffering. This is disgusting!"

Sri Swamiji says, "I don't know why people like to live on. I wish to leave quickly so I can take birth again and run, play, eat, sing, dance, see and hear. What is the use of living in a flat with all the windows shut in total darkness and going on saying, 'I want to live, I want to live, I want to live?'" That is the disgust that Sri Rama is expressing here, "Even though people become totally ineffective, they do not wish to lose their grip on life. They wish to live in the darkness with all the senses blanked out. They do not wish to enjoy life afresh. Therefore, I am disgusted with old age and I see defects everywhere."

Instability of life: "You have taught me the dharma so well that when I see others not following the dharma, I become

affected. When I see things that are not happening in the proper manner, I become affected. I am seeing defects in everything, in everyone. That is another problem: the instability of life.

Life is always changing from day to day. The soul also follows the pattern of life and is not allowed free expression. That is another major problem for me. We are binding the soul to a state of experience that has no relevance or meaning for the attainment of higher realization. This world is full of unbearable sorrows. These are my problems. I am disgusted with my life, with the affairs of the state, society and family. I don't find any happiness, peace or focus in my life."

Vasishtha said to Sri Rama, "I will answer your questions and remove your doubts." Thereafter, Sri Rama asked Vasishtha three hundred and thirty-three questions, and Sage Vasishtha answered each one of them. This dialogue between Sri Rama and his guru has been inscribed in the book *Yoga Vasishtha, the Yoga of Sage Vasishtha*.



Entry to the Kingdom of Moksha

25 March 2012

Yoga Vasishtha is a treatise, a scripture and book in which Sri Rama's questions in relation to life, world, mind and God have been answered by his guru, Sage Vasishtha. The teachings of yoga to Sri Rama were given when he entered a state of despondency and depression. Similarly, the teachings of yoga were given to Arjuna by Krishna on the battlefield when he had descended into a state of depression and despondency. In the same way, the teachings of yoga today are given to you when you experience frustrations, problems, difficulties, depression and despondency in your life. Until you experience pain, suffering, disease or illness, you do not care about yoga or anything that might help to improve yourself.

You come to yoga the moment you feel that your body, mind and emotions are in turmoil and out of balance. You come to yoga for rectification of that imbalance. Yoga begins in everyone's life when they encounter a negative state, tendency, frame of mind, emotion or lifestyle. Yoga begins with *vishada*, depression. What is the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*? 'Vishada Yoga', the yoga of depression, the 'yoga of soggy face'. Whenever you are in a state of depression and dejection, you have a soggy face: the eyes become puffed up, tears begin to well, the mind is non-functional, and there is a sense of absolute despair and hopelessness. At that time yoga comes into play. Remember, yoga does not

begin with asana and pranayama. Yoga does not begin with awareness of your health. Yoga begins when you become aware of a problem within yourself and try to find a solution to overcome that problem. Therefore, the teachings of yoga have to be understood in the perspective being taught by the rishis, so that you begin to understand your relationship and connection with yourself, your mind, the senses and the world. Thereafter, cultivate the strength to rise above all the frustrations and limiting factors and conditions of life.

Yoga does not begin with the inclination, “I want to realize God.” To say, “I want to realize God” is very infantile and immature. Many volumes have been written on the subject by many intellectuals and personalities, both religious and spiritual. However, in reality, despite having read all those volumes, what has been your true gain? Nothing. Zero. It is because you have to cultivate an awareness and strength that does not come out of an intellectual process of understanding. It comes with modification and fine-tuning; it comes with an awareness of how you interact with the world, with your senses and with your own self. This is the teaching contained in all the yogic scriptures. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali speak about the dissipated mental states which cause frustration. The stated aim is to control these dissipations of the mind with the practices of yoga. Similarly, in the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna is instructing Arjuna on the same thing. Likewise in *Yoga Vasishtha*, Sage Vasishtha is giving Sri Rama a glimpse into the nature of life, the world and the mind.

Sri Rama appears in the court, in the presence of his father, King Dasharatha, his guru, Sage Vasishtha, and the other enlightened rishi, Sage Vishwamitra. He is asked why he feels so lonely, why he is isolating himself and what his thought process is. Sri Rama begins to describe what he is feeling and experiencing within himself. Some people say that this state of Sri Rama arose due to *vairagya*, but I say no.

If Sri Rama was experiencing true *vairagya*, non-attachment or dispassion, he would not undergo the process of mental confusion. The thoughts that are arising in his

mind are due to a sense of hopelessness, as he realizes the impermanence of the world, the senses and sense objects. He begins to think, “It is in this world that I have to live. What is my role in it, what is my duty? How do I understand the world? How do I understand society? How do I understand myself? How can I find my balance to be efficient and effective in my responsibilities, as prince, future king, and an individual without any post or labels? How can I be totally fixed and focused, and ensure that there is growth and development in my life?”



Nature of the world

Sri Rama asks three hundred and thirty-three questions before the gurus and his father. However, these questions can be classified as personal, mental, emotional or rational; in relation to the world, the soul or the higher nature. When Sage Vasishtha hears them out, he says, “Rama, first understand what is the nature of the world in which you have to live and act for the duration

of your life. It is true that there is nothing permanent in this world and everything is transitory. Everything is changeable; nothing remains constant in this world of name, form and qualities. All the sense objects of the world are recognized and identified by a name, form and quality. These sense objects are the things with which one associates in life. However, the sense objects exist only to fulfil your needs, not to bring you satisfaction, whether sensorial or sensual. They are only there to fulfil your physical, mental, emotional and intellectual needs and to prepare you to start the journey of contemplation and reflection, so that ultimately you can discover what the reality and the truth are.

“The nature of the world is impermanent. The objects of pleasure, prosperity and passion, all the experiences that you have in life, which you called the ‘defects of childhood and youth’, are the effects of *maya*, illusion. Everything is there, it exists no doubt, as this world is created out of *tamas*. *Tamas* is the conditioning; it is the form, the shape with which we identify, crave and desire. This whole world is born out of *tamas*, not *sattwa* and not *rajas*. *Tamas* is the conditioned state of form, name and quality, irrespective of whether it is good or bad. *Tamas* is not negative as many people think it to be. It is a state of existence and experience. It exists just as night exists. Is night bad? No, it exists as a balance to day. In the same manner, *tamas* exists as a balance to *sattwa*. However, *sattwa* is the realm of the divine and *tamas* is the realm of the impermanent life.

“*Sattwa* is the realm of the permanent existence and eternal life, whereas *tamas* is the realm of transitory life. We identify so much with the transitory life that we will not let go. Even though we cannot enjoy life, we want to cling on to it. Even though there is suffering in life, we want to cling on to life. Since this world is *tamas* and we are born in it, our body is *tamasic*; our nature, emotions and mind have a *tamasic* condition. As long as you can act in this world of *tamas*, remember, O’ Rama, that everything is illusory and transitory. That is the nature of the world and the individual.”

External and internal universe

When Sri Rama hears Sage Vasishtha speak in this manner, he puts forth a question, “What is the opposite of this transitory world in which everything is identified by the senses, and we encounter difficulties and strife every moment? What is the opposite where there is absolute *shanti*, peace, where there is absolute *samatvam*, equilibrium?” Sage Vasishtha replies, “Yes, there is an opposite universe too; however, it is not outside of you, it is within you. Your perception of the world is through your mind. If you see negativity in the world, then know that there is also positivity in the world.

You are seeing negativity in the world through your eyes, mind and perception. You can also see the goodness in the world through your mind and perception. If you think that the world is tamasic, recognize that to be the nature of the world. At the same time, you can also view the world as sattwic. That is the alternate, that is the parallel world which is within you. This parallel world, where everything is in harmony and balance, is the realm of *moksha*, liberation, freedom. In the tamasic world, *ashanti*, strife, governs. In the other world, the inner world, shanti is the ruler. Where ashanti is the ruler, you will encounter strife all the time, but where shanti is the ruler, you will discover peace every step of the way. To arrive at the realm of shanti or moksha, you must enter the kingdom.

Four guards to the kingdom of moksha

There are four gates to the kingdom of shanti or moksha. At these four gates stand four guards. If you become friends with the guards who are guarding the doors to the realm of peace and liberation, you may enter it. If you are not friendly with the guards, no matter how high and mighty you may be, you will not be permitted to enter. The only condition to enter the realm of moksha is to become friendly with the guards.

The trick is that if you can become friendly with one guard, he will introduce you to the others too, and you will become friendly with all four. That applies to the family too. If a stranger becomes friends with the son, the son introduces this friend to his parents, sisters, brothers and other friends, "Look I have a new friend here." In the same manner, if you are able to become friends with even one guard, he will introduce you to the other guards. They will also become your friends. Who are the guards? The first guard in the realm of moksha is *shanti*, peace; the second guard is *vichara*, reflection; the third guard is *santosha*, contentment; the fourth guard is *satsang*, positive association.

Attainment of shanti in this dimension is the first guard. Reflection is another guard, so that you can strain out the

unnecessary stuff. Just as you strain your tea and the strainer catches the tea leaves and only the liquid comes out into the cup, in the same manner, through reflection you can strain your behaviour. Keep the rubbish in the strainer and allow the pure water to come out through reflection. Become friendly with contentment and satsang.

Shanti

Sri Rama says, “What do you mean, shanti is a guard? How can shanti be a guard?” Sage Vasishtha says, “Shanti is always the first guard. It is not the last to be attained; it is the first to be acquired.” You think that shanti, peace, is something that comes at the end; however, this is wrong. Change your idea today. Shanti is the first requirement. Shanti becomes your friend when there is serenity of mind and the emotions are calm.

In your life, whether you are active in the family, society or profession, what are the two things that are always affected? The mind and the emotions. If there is a difficulty or strife in a relationship between a husband and wife who may be otherwise compatible, the emotions and the mind are affected. In a profession, stress affects the mind and also the emotions. In regular interaction in society, the mind and emotions are involved. Therefore, you first have to find a way to calm your mind to experience serenity of the mind, and a way to calm your emotions. If you can do that, then the serenity of mind and the calmness of emotions will give birth to the experience of peace and harmony. Always work for maintaining mental and emotional balance as the first step, no matter what situation you are facing in life. This is the theory and description that Sage Vasishtha has given to Sri Rama to discover shanti in life: management of the mind and the emotions.

Reduction of desires

Sage Vasishtha further says, “Serenity of mind is attained with the reduction of vasanas.” You might have heard Sri Swamiji

make a similar statement in his satsangs. People ask him, “How do we know if we are making progress and growth in spiritual life? What are the milestones, the indications of our progress on our spiritual path?” Sri Swamiji answers by saying, “When you are able to manage the ambitions, the desires of the mind, and there is a gradual reduction of them, then you will know that you are progressing on the spiritual path.”

The same question was asked of Mahatma Buddha, and he gave the same answer. He said, “Elimination of desire is an indication of growth in spiritual life.” This does make sense, as desires are what connect you with the world of senses and sense objects. Whenever you encounter any kind of mental or emotional problem, you will discover that the root of that problem is always a desire, a desire to be something, to have something, or to be recognized as something. Desire or *vasana* is always there, and it is the cause of mental and emotional imbalance. Therefore, serenity of mind and of emotions is acquired by understanding the desires, aspirations and ambitions. That is step one.

The moment you are able to work through your mind and emotions by managing your *vasanas*, the guard whose name is Shanti becomes your friend and comes to your aid. If you can become good friends with Shanti, he will stand beside you at all times. In all the difficult situations he will be beside you, and you shall never be disturbed or affected by the external situations. Therefore, analyze your *vasanas*.

True reflection

The second guard is reflection, enquiry, *atma vichara*. The purpose of reflection is to dispel the cloud of ignorance. Its purpose is to cultivate a better understanding. Generally, when you reflect, you begin to brood on the problem and don't search for a solution. It is the normal condition of life that if there is a thought process or any kind of reflection, it is usually about your suffering or what you do not have, which I call 'the worry factor'. In your life, reflection is not pure. Reflection takes on the garb of worries.



When reflection takes on the garb of worries, then you go deeper into a state of mind from which you cannot extract yourself naturally, freely and spontaneously. You get caught in the vortex of that thought, idea, feeling, sentiment or emotion, and it sucks you down; it takes you down. As you get sucked into that feeling and vortex of worry, wisdom and knowledge disappear and you encounter more darkness. It is like diving down deep into the ocean. If there is a vortex in the ocean and you are caught in it, you simply go down. You leave the sky, the sun and the wind above and are surrounded by water and you suffocate there. That is *avidya*, ignorance. The negative side of reflection always pulls you down into a deeper state of ignorance.

Instead of worrying about something, reflect upon it to discover the solution to that problem. Instead of worrying, “I am like this and like that”, reflect on how you can cultivate your strength to avoid being like that and instead be something different and better. Through reflection, guilt and ignorance and all such things can be avoided. The clarity of mind can be maintained. With clarity of mind comes wisdom and knowledge. That wisdom and knowledge become *atma vichara*, reflection on one’s own self.

I will give one example from Sri Rama's life. In the *Ramayana* it is described that when Sri Rama was living in the forest with Lakshmana and Sita, his father died in Ayodhya. The younger brothers of Sri Rama, Bharata and Shatrughna, came to him in the forest to request that he return to Ayodhya and take charge of the kingdom. They came with the entire court, the army and the family to supplicate Sri Rama to return. As the army, the courtiers and the family members were marching from Ayodhya to Rama's place of dwelling, all those who saw them on the road felt that Bharata was out to destroy Sri Rama so he could inherit the kingdom. Lakshmana was out in the jungle collecting fruit, and from the top of a tree he saw a dust cloud, and realized it was the army of Ayodhya marching towards them. He said to himself, "Bharata is coming to kill us so he can inherit the kingdom." He ran to Sri Rama and said, "Hide! Bharata is coming with the army to kill you." Sri Rama was sitting quietly. He said, "What do you mean, he is coming to kill me?" Lakshmana replied, "Yes, he is coming with the entire army. Father is dead; you, the eldest prince, are the successor now. If he kills both you and me, he will become the king. That is his intention. His mother Kaikeyi must have poisoned his mind. Quick, let us hide."

At that moment, Sri Rama reflected. He did not go by what was said by his closest brother, Lakshmana. He reflected, and analyzed the nature and character of Bharata and of all the people accompanying him. He arrived at the conclusion, "No, their intention is not bad; there is no need to hide. He is coming to meet me."

Now, put yourself in his place. You would have believed other people, you would have worried about the situation, you would have taken out your AK-47 and said, "Okay, let him come, I am going to shoot him first." There would not have been any reflection on your part. There would have been a reaction, not reflection.

Many times, the in-charges of the ashram come to complain about something, and they say, "This person is

like this and like that. You should tell them something.” I say, “Do you want me to react like you are reacting, or do you want me to act as a guru?” Then I think, I reflect, and I find a way to manage the situation in which everybody is happy. This is an example, but something which can be emulated by everybody.

In worry, anxiety and frustration there is always reaction and no reflection. Reflection takes place when you are able to see the situation in a different light. When you are able to analyze the nature, then it is possible to discover that something is being said out of jealousy and not genuine concern. Often, it is not the other person who is at fault; it is the one complaining who is at fault. That is reflection. The idea of reflection, however, goes much deeper. Reflection is where you keep your focus before you all the time and do not get swayed by the influences that surround you. Utilize your wisdom and knowledge, and dispel the cloud of ignorance from your life which makes you do the wrong thing and reap a negative result. If you can become aware and cultivate this understanding, this quality of knowing and observing, they become the stepping stones which lead you to a reflection between you, the nature and the divine. You discover a connection and link among the three, and the sensorial links are severed. In the course of time, this reflection becomes jnana. It becomes the realization of, “What I am.” With this realization, *avidya* or ignorance disappears.

Santosha, expression of a harmonious mind

The third guard to the gate of moksha is contentment, santosha. Contentment is an expression of a harmonious and balanced mind. One who does not desire or crave anything, one who is satisfied, yet active and dynamic, is in a state of santosha. Often, contentment is seen as a negation of effort. Often, people say, “If I am content, it means that I don’t have to make any effort. I don’t have any desire, I don’t have to want anything, I don’t have to like anything; I just have to be satisfied with what I have.” That is wrong, as it goes against



the very principle of contentment. Contentment does not deny effort. Contentment emphasizes *purushartha*, the effort that you make to become better. It is not just an action or performance of life, but it is a continuous effort to become better each day.

To illustrate this idea, look at your own life. What effort do you make each day to improve a shortcoming of your character, nature, mind and personality? You read scriptures; you listen to sadhus, saints and satsangs. You also eulogize people who you hear and say, "Oh, what a wonderful speech." However, at a personal level, have you made any effort to improve yourself even half a percent on a daily basis? Even a quarter percent on a daily basis?

Nobody makes that effort, and yet everyone wants to have the attainment. Contentment does not deny *purushartha*. It is an attitude, an awareness that "Yes, I am happy." Just as you are aware of your suffering on a day-to-day basis, on a moment-to-moment basis, you have to be aware of your happiness on a day-to-day and moment-to-moment basis. If you have a fight with somebody, the whole day you will be aware of that person, right? The whole day the thoughts

about that person will go around and around in your head; about all the awful things said and done. Just as you are aware of your pain and suffering constantly and continuously, can you make the effort to become aware of your happiness constantly and continuously? If you can do that, then you are santosha, then you are contented. It is an awareness, an attitude.

Identify, maintain and sustain for extended periods of time, for as many days as possible, your connection with internal happiness, and minimize the experiences and projections of pain and suffering which emanate from you. That is contentment. If you develop friendship with the third guard, no situation in life can adversely affect you.

Satsang is inspiration

The fourth guard is satsang, which means to be in the company of truth, in the company of good people. A discourse or discussion is not called satsang. Many people give discourses and answer questions, but that is not called satsang. Satsang means an inspiration which you receive and maintain within. When you encounter a sage, and he looks at you with his benevolent, peaceful and compassionate eyes, that look is also satsang. With that look, something changes in your mind, something changes within you; you identify with a positive quality. Whether it is positivity, compassion or love that you find in that look, you say, “Just the look transformed me.” You say, “What a beautiful feeling it was when he looked at me.” This means that something inspired an energy arousal within you, which made you happy. Therefore, no matter what your mood is, smile at everybody every morning and say, “Good morning.”

What harm is there if you look at someone, smile and say, “Good morning”? That creates a positive feeling, does it not? A happy look and a happy smile can create a positive feeling more so than a frowning look and face. Even that is satsang, sharing of your happiness, your optimism, your contentment with everybody, uplifting each one as you go.

I am giving you two different ideas of satsang. Satsang is sharing of your happiness, wisdom, love and compassion. Satsang is sharing the light and not spreading the darkness. Understand this properly. A positive, appropriate communication, which can motivate and inspire a person to be more active, optimistic and positive, is called satsang. Whether it is a sentence, a lecture, an answer to a question, a simple glance or simply being in the presence of an enlightened master, satsang transforms the inner nature.

Satsang removes the depressions of the heart and brings joy in the emotions. It removes confusion of mind and gives a sense of hope in the place of hopelessness. It allows you to express the better part of yourself. People will always love and appreciate your better part. What people don't like or appreciate is your negative part. Nobody likes your negative side, but everybody loves your happy, positive side. Just a simple smile means 'welcome' to everyone. Thus, satsang is the fourth guard, to remain contented, happy and joyous.

Moksha: freedom

According to Sage Vasishtha, "If you can become friends with these guards, they will take you to the dimension of moksha." Moksha is freedom from the bondage of the senses, from the limitations of the mind, and from identification with pain and suffering. The character of the mind is nothing but ideas and imagination. Sage Vasishtha explains to Sri Rama that, "Chitta arises out of pure consciousness." This *chitta*, the aspect of the mind dealing with memories and samskaras, begins to imagine and create ideas. When these imaginations and ideas become prominent, that is the experience of the mind.

Ideations and imaginations are the two functions of the mind. These two functions cover a lot of ground; they give many faces to the mind. The mind does not have just one face, like you. It has many faces, and these faces of the mind are created with ideations and imagination. Imagination is the greatest bondage and its absence is the state of freedom.

Methods to Transform the Limited Identity

26 March 2012

Sri Rama asked his guru, Sage Vasishtha, questions in relation to life, mind, emotions, dissatisfactions, discontentment, soul and the Higher Self, in many different ways. Guru Vasishtha explained to him, “There are two parallel worlds, parallel existences of every individual. One is the outer dimension; the other is the inner, spiritual dimension. The outer world is governed by, and is a reflection of the mind, which is gross. The inner world is an experience which arises when the mind has been transcended. The outer world, in which the mind is



connected with the senses and the sense objects, and identifies with them, has the support of *sankalpa* and *vikalpa*.”

Sankalpa is ideation and *vikalpa* is imagination. These two are the strengths or supporters of the mind, when the mind interacts with the outer world. Consequently, the mind cultivates a particular trait which is experienced as identification with the body and mind. This identification is known as *ahamkara*, the ego principle.

Four types of ahamkara

Sage Vasishtha explains that there are four kinds of *ahamkara*. Two are related with the individual existence, the material existence and identification, the external identification. The other two are associated with awareness of the spiritual potential that exists within. The ego with which we identify regularly and on a daily basis is the individual ego in its two variations. First: *Deho ham iti* – “I am this body, and I identify with this body.” You look around and you will find certain people who consider their body to be the last and the final work in creation. If there is a small pimple, they get worried, “What is happening to my body?” They identify so intensely with the body that if they look at themselves without makeup, they don’t like their body. They think, “Oh, I am very ugly.” The only way they can remove the ugliness of their body is by putting on different colours. After all, this is infatuation with the body. People do not accept the body which has been given to them by God. They say, “I can still make an improvement on what God has created.” That is identification with the body, *Deho ham iti*.

The other identification is of the mind: *Chitto ham iti*. Just as body-infatuated people take care of their body, people also try to take care of their mind in the same manner. They try to colour the mind so there is a sense of happiness, a sense of, “I am a bit more intelligent than others.” Sometimes the ignorance in your mind tells you, “You are a bit better than other people.” The mind inspires you to fulfil its own desires and expectations. That is the ego of the mind.

Thus, the individual ego is the ego of the body and of the mind. If somebody says, “You are ugly”, which ego is hurt? The ego of the body. Suddenly you become aware of your physical ugliness and feel dejected, and try to find the plastic surgeon. In the same manner, when you are suffering from mental problems you go to a psychoanalyst and tell them your mental difficulties and the problems you are facing.

The psychoanalyst says, “Try to find a consensus in your thoughts, try to find a balance.” However, to try to find balance or consensus is very difficult. For example, you have an apple, which you want to eat. There are others who are also eyeing that apple in your hand, but you do not want to share it. Therefore, there is a conflict, “This is mine, why should I share it with anybody else?” A separation, disconnection takes place between you and the other people because of your greed. The consensus man says, “Do one thing, make juice out of this apple, and everybody can have a sip of that.” Once again there is dissatisfaction, because now you are getting only one sip of the apple juice. You only get to taste the apple and not eat the apple. Mental frustrations begin with this. See your own life; you do not need any other example but yourself to understand the mental ego.

These are the individual egos, the physical body identification and the mental identification. Consequently, this body and mind identification gives birth to a nature which is selfish, self-oriented and self-centred. These two egos relate with the material dimension.

There is another level of ego, the transcendental ego. In the transcendental ego the idea is, “I am beyond this body and beyond this mind.” The idea is discovered and nurtured by the superior ego and not the gross ego. You still retain the awareness, “I am beyond everything that exists.” This means that you are identifying yourself as separate from your attachments, associations and objects. There remains an awareness of the individuality, but the identification of body and mind is not there: *Sakal ati aham iti* – “I am beyond all, I am beyond everything.” That is the spiritual ego. Gurus have

this spiritual ego. Gurus cannot function in this world without the spiritual ego. Even sages and masters cannot function in this world without the spiritual ego. They need to cultivate the spiritual identification, the spiritual ideation. Cultivation of the spiritual ego lifts them up from the awareness and identification of the body, which is gross, and the mind which is connected with the world of senses.

The fourth type of ego is: *Aham sarvamidam vishwam* – “I am the entire creation, I am the entire universe.” This ego is required. This identification is necessary in order that you disconnect with every experience of the creation and connect with the transcendental quality and nature.



Sage Vasishtha tells Sri Rama, “These are the four kinds of ego. Two are material and two are spiritual. When you are caught up in the material ego there is strife, suffering, confusion, and conflict. Transcend the ego of the body and mind, and cultivate the ego of the spirit to go beyond the mind.” Ultimately, the whole world is nothing but a reflection of the mind. If you put on dark-coloured glasses, the world will be seen as dark. If you put on red glasses, you will see the world as red. If you put on yellow glasses, the world will be seen as yellow. If you put on green glasses, the world will be seen as green.

Your desires, *vasanas*, are like these different coloured glasses. You perceive everything according to whichever desire is prominent or highlighted. Therefore, the experience of the world is not objective; the experience of the world is subjective and mental. The world existed before you were born, and the world will continue to exist after you die. It is how you interact in the world while you are living that is important for you. If you interact with the world in a positive manner, you will reap positive benefits. If you interact with the world in a negative, destructive, discordant manner, you will reap the natural consequences.

Sri Rama asks, “Guruji, how can I transcend this physical and mental identification with the senses and sense objects?” Sage Vasishtha tells him to cultivate the idea: *Isha vasyam idam sarvam* – “The higher force, the transcendental force, is the source of everything.” Therefore, identify with that higher nature. Just as you are able to identify with your pain without any effort, just as you are able to identify with your suffering without any effort whatsoever, cultivate the nature and the quality to identify yourself with the higher nature. Initially, it is an effort, but eventually it has to become natural. It has to flow, it has to become spontaneous.

Recognize that this world, this creation is a temple of the divine. If you think, “This is my home”, you have lost the plot. This has been the statement of the Upanishads as well. It is said in *Ishavasya Upanishad* (v.1):

*Isha vasyam idam sarvam yatkincha jagatyam jagat
Tena tyaktena bhunjeetha ma gridhah kasyasvid dhanam.*

This whole world is actually the home of God, and you are the traveller who has come into His home for rest and relaxation. While you are living in the home of God, live with awareness of God and dignity of the Self. When you visit a temple, church or mosque, when you visit a place of worship, what kind of awareness, thought, inclination and faith do you have at that moment? Your mental state in a place of worship is different from how it is normally at home. At home you think you are free to do anything and everything, but in a place of worship you restrain yourself. If the rule says, 'Leave the shoes outside', you automatically leave the shoes outside. If the rule says, 'Be silent in the temple', you will not question that, you will automatically become silent. If you have an inclination to pray, you will simply sit down and pray.

The behaviour appropriate to the place of worship manifests when you go with that attitude. The behaviour appropriate to the place of profession manifests when you go to the place of profession. A behaviour appropriate to your home manifests when you are at home. A behaviour appropriate to a party manifests when you go to a party. In every place, there is an appropriate behaviour which you manifest or express. In life, you must cultivate an appropriate understanding and appropriate behaviour. This life is a gift from God to you, and you need to look after it, not misuse it and abuse it as you have done until now.

You do not consider this life to be a gift from God. You think that you get your life through the union of father and mother. You do get your body through the process, certainly. The body is given to you by your father and your nature is given to you by your mother; however, life is given to you by the Cosmic Father. The body is your father's contribution; your sensitivity, mind and nature are your mother's contribution. The life that you live, the awareness, the faculties of the intellect, emotions and creativity are a gift

from God, not of your father or mother. Thus, three people have contributed to your existence. You are the product of three people: father, mother and the Cosmic Father. This creation is a part of that Cosmic Father's play. After all, for how long do you live in your parents' home? For some time. For how long do you live in the home of your Cosmic Father? All your life.

Therefore, cultivate and nurture the awareness of the divine pervading each and every aspect of your life and creation, *Isha vasyam idam sarvam*. Cultivate the spiritual awareness, "I am a part, an extension and an emanation of the highest power. I am not this body, I am not this mind. I am not the experiences of the body; I am not the experiences of the mind. My life is a gift of God to me." Cherish that life and try to make it better and beautiful, harmonious and tranquil, creative and dynamic. Shun, reject and avoid those situations and conditions which tie you down to a particular emotional or mental behaviour that is binding, limiting or restricting to the development of the total potential of your life.

Mental vairagya

Sri Rama says, "How do I cultivate this transcendental awareness and remove my mind from the outer and connect it with the inner experience?" Sage Vasishtha answers, "Through mental vairagya." *Vairagya* has been translated as dispassion in English. However, the idea of vairagya has to be understood in relation to the play of the mind. The opposite of vairagya is *raga*, which means craving and search for happiness, attraction to those things that you feel can bring happiness and contentment. It means association and attachment with that idea, and clinging on. The moment an attachment is formed, you become dependent on that association.

Vairagya is the opposite. Mental vairagya is knowing the areas of your dependency, infatuations and external obsessions, and then gradually cultivating the awareness that they are impermanent and transitory. If you consider this principle, you will discover that since your childhood you

have gone through many stages of attachment and rejections. Attachments have pleased you and rejections have displeased you. However, if you can develop an awareness that all this is transitory, this too shall pass, this infatuation or desire will pass, “It is only a temporary thing that has emerged in my mind due to the impurities of the mind and the influences of the desires”, then you can cultivate vairagya.

Once this type of awareness and realization dawns, you can start to slowly extract yourself from the attachments. Actually, there is no attachment, it is you who is holding on to a tree and screaming, “The tree is not letting me go; it has bound me!” Is the tree at fault or are you at fault? Is the world at fault or are you at fault? Are the sense objects at fault, or is your identification with them at fault? If you analyze it from this perspective, you will agree that there is no attachment. You are the one who clings to something with certain expectations. In order to become free, you simply have to remove the binding of the arm around the tree, that is all. The moment you do so, you are free.

Cultivate mental vairagya and along with it cultivate *dharana*, one-pointed focus or awareness. Dharana is a natural progression after vairagya. Dharana happens naturally and spontaneously when vairagya is attained. The moment you disassociate, your mind becomes still and focused. When the mind becomes still, fix yourself in the awareness of your spiritual qualities, the sattwic qualities, and not with the tamasic or rajasic qualities which surround you. The moment you become identified with the sattwa nature within you, your life becomes like that of a lotus which grows in mud. It is surrounded by water, but not a single drop of water can stay upon the lotus leaf. That is why the lotus has become a symbol of spiritual knowledge and spiritual experience.

The growth of a lotus indicates that you are born in maya, in mud, surrounded by water, yet you are free from the drops of water. The leaf of the lotus does not hold any water. The moment you put a single drop on it, the drop simply rolls off.



Threefold strength of mind

Cultivate spiritual awareness. Sri Swamiji has said many times, “The aim of human life is not God-realization; rather, it is the cultivation of spiritual awareness.” How far you are able to go does not matter. Do not think about one hundred percent; try to obtain even half a percent of spiritual awareness in your life and you will have obtained everything. When the mind is free from its sensorial, mundane and external attachments, then it cultivates its own strength.

There are three strengths of the mind: *iccha shakti*, will power; *jnana shakti*, knowledge power; *kriya shakti*, creative power. Even now you have these three within you; however, you are not utilizing them, as there is a dissipation of the mental faculties and energies. Similarly, for example, when a bulb is turned on, the light spreads in all directions, it is dissipated. The light is there, no doubt, but there is no force in that light. However, if you were able to focus the power of light to a single point, it becomes a laser beam and thus gains in strength. You can apply that laser beam to cut iron, perform optical nerve surgery, and so on. It is this focusing

of mental perceptions that you attain in dharana, which leads to the development of willpower, iccha shakti, and the mind gains its true strength and its true character.

Once the mind becomes as powerful as a laser beam, knowledge also becomes focused. Right now the knowledge is dissipated, but when it is focused it becomes jnana shakti. The simplest way to understand jnana shakti is as the quality of understanding. I believe the greatest strength in the world is not love, as many people say. Love is not a strength, nor is compassion or sympathy. The highest quality of life is understanding. If you can understand situations, if you can understand life, then all the best qualities flower spontaneously within you without any effort. Understanding is the root of life that has to be watered daily. Love, compassion and the other sattwic qualities are flowers and fruit of the tree of life, which you can admire and enjoy, but understanding is the root of the tree of life. Therefore, ensure that you give water and compost to that root of life on a regular basis. Protect the root of life from the insects and rodents that nibble away at it, which are not visible, being underground.

The highest quality that anyone can have in life is understanding. Everything else falls into place after that. If there is no understanding, you can be going gaga with love and that will not help at all. That love will have no meaning for you, that compassion will have no meaning for you. Cultivate understanding. With the cultivation of understanding or jnana shakti, kriya shakti then becomes predominant. And with that kriya shakti, creative and harmonious interaction between the individual and the world arises.

Qualities of the higher mind

With awareness of the transcendental nature, cultivation of mental vairagya, attainment of dharana, and emergence of the three strengths of mind: iccha shakti, jnana shakti and kriya shakti – willpower, understanding and creativity, the

oscillation of the mind will stop. When the oscillation of the mind stops, you experience the greatness of the mind. You experience the omniscience and omnipotence of the mind. That mind is not the individual mind; it is the higher mind.

Swami Sivananda used to say, “In order to explore the energies of the mind, sow a positive thought, an appropriate thought. From that thought reap an action. Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action and reap a habit. Thought, action, habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Thought, action, habit, character. Sow a character and reap a destiny. Thought, action, habit, character, destiny.” The process is: sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny. This is the link that Swami Sivananda has given as the beginning and the end point of mind. Thought is the beginning of the mind and destiny is the end of the mind. Thought is the beginning, destiny is the end. Sage Vasishtha is saying the same thing.

Pranayama awakens prana shakti

Sri Rama says to Sage Vasishtha, “You are telling me many things, but are there any practical ways in which I can experience them?” Sage Vasishtha says, “Yes, O’ Rama, practise pranayama.” Why does Sage Vasishtha suggest the practice of pranayama?

According to the yogic concepts, there are three flows in our body: the solar force, the lunar force, and the balanced force. The solar force is known as *pingala*, the lunar force is known as *ida* and the balanced force is known as *sushumna*. These three flows are carriers of a specific gross, subtle and spiritual energy.

Pingala is the gross energy, *prana shakti*. Your body functions because of prana shakti. In the absence of prana, you are devoid of the physical life. Ida is the *chitta shakti*, the mental force. The mind is sustained and nurtured by this flow of ida shakti, the subtle prana. One is gross, the other is

subtle. The spiritual nature of every individual is nurtured by sushumna, the balance of both. Sage Vasishtha tells Sri Rama, “If the body is disturbed, or if it is experiencing ill-health, you can manage all the imbalances and rectify all the defects and diseases of your body by awakening the force of prana shakti.”

This has been seen in the life of yogis, who are able to manage many of the physical conditions with the practice of pranayama. Even asana is not necessary, as pranayama increases the vital energy, the prana shakti, and removes the blocks of prana. Disease occurs when there is a block of prana. Headache occurs when there is a block of prana. Eyesight is lost when there is a block of prana in the eyes, hearing is lost when there is a block of prana in the ears, and speech is lost when there is a block of prana at the throat in the speech centre. Digestion becomes sluggish when there is a loss of prana in the digestive system. Muscles become weak when there is a loss of prana in the muscular system. Nervous tensions and nervousness come in when there is a loss of prana in the nervous system. Respiratory problems occur when there is a loss of prana in the respiratory organs. That is the theory and concept of yoga therapy. Remove the blocks of prana which are afflicting a particular organ, or system or location within your body. Many yogis practise pranayama as their sadhana. They have no blocks in their body; they are in optimum health.

In 1977, Sir Edmund Hillary, the man who conquered Mount Everest, made a trip. He followed the path of the river Ganga, from Ganga Sagar, the place where Ganga merges into the ocean, to the source of Ganga in the Himalayas. He went backwards, travelling in three powerful rocket boats, to go against the current of the river. When he was travelling through the meandering river above the Rishikesh area, he saw an emaciated yogi in the middle of the river, seated on a rock. Sir Edmund Hillary stopped near the rock, called out to the yogi seated there, and said, “What are you doing?” The yogi said, “I am practising pranayama.”

Hillary said, “What is the attainment of pranayama?” The yogi said, “Nothing, only vitality.” They had a chat for about ten minutes.

Then, Sir Edmund Hillary decided to continue on his journey. While he was talking to the yogi, the three boats had anchored. They had thrown the rope on the rock and tied the rope to the anchor there. Now the ropes were unhitched, the engines were started and the boats were put in forward gear. However, the boats did not move. The engines were checked, everything was fine, the rev was fine, there was power and fuel, so what was wrong? At that moment Sir Edmund Hillary happened to look back and saw that this emaciated yogi, seated on a rock in the middle of the Ganga, was holding the three ropes in his hand. He was holding back the boats. This is a story published in the *Times of India* in 1977. It is an indication of the power of prana shakti of a yogi whose body is just skin and bones. He was holding the ropes of the three powerful motor boats and all the rev of the engine could not move them forward. Therefore, do not think of prana as your breath, but as the force of life.

Nada kumbhaka

There was a disciple of Swami Sivananda by the name of Swami Nadabrahmananda, who had perfected nada kumbhaka. He was a royal musician in the court of Mysore. He had taken initiation and eventually he took sannyasa from Swami Sivananda, who gave him the sadhana to perfect nada yoga. Swami Nadabrahmananda was a delightful person, so simple, baby-like and innocent that when you looked at him you had to wonder at his character. However, despite this soft appearance, when he used to perform his kumbhaka, he could hold the breath for one hour. Even the best divers who are trained in breath-holding cannot hold the breath for more than three to five minutes.

In the Menninger Foundation in the US, research was conducted by Dr Elmer Green on Swami Nadabrahmananda. He was put in an air-tight glass chamber. Two other similar

chambers were placed beside it. In one, they lit a candle and closed the door. In the other, they put a monkey and closed the door. They covered Swami Nadabrahmananda's body with wax, blocked his nose, blocked all the orifices of the body from top to bottom and asked him to play the tabla. Tabla-playing is not an easy thing, after five minutes you get exhausted. Swami Nadabrahmananda sat inside the chamber for forty minutes and played the tabla.

The candle flame went out after three to four minutes, as the oxygen was burnt up. The monkey fell unconscious after about ten minutes of jumping here and there, due to the high content of carbon dioxide in that enclosed glass chamber. Swami Nadabrahmananda, without breathing, with all the orifices of the body from top to bottom plugged, sat and played the tabla for forty minutes. The scientist put a coin on his head, and it was seen dancing and jumping on the crown of his head. The scientist put a microphone of the tape recorder on different parts of the body and recorded the sound. All they heard was *Om*.

Swami Nadabrahmananda had perfected nada kumbhaka, and this is an example of prana shakti. Therefore, do not equate prana with breath, or pranayama with breath exercises. In the same manner, the mental prana, the chitta shakti also becomes active and powerful. Once chitta shakti becomes active and powerful, all the activities of the mind can be controlled, guided and calmed.

The two flows of ida and pingala connect with the right and the left hemispheres of the brain, respectively. There are two hemispheres of the brain, the right and the left, but the problem is that in the right hemisphere there is nothing left and in the left hemisphere there is nothing right! When you practise pranayama, you make the left hemisphere right, and bring back into the right hemisphere what had left it, so there is balance and harmony of the vital forces! In all seriousness, however, Sage Vasishtha talks of pranayama practice to Sri Rama and tells him, "Pranayama is a method by which you can regulate the functions, the deficiencies of your body and mind."

From dual experience to union: atmabhava

Sri Rama questions, “After stilling my mind with pranayama, how do I connect with a higher purpose?”

Sage Vasishtha now describes another yoga to Sri Rama: the process of bhakti. He defines bhakti in two aspects: bheda bhakti and abheda bhakti. *Bheda bhakti* is the bhakti of dualism, *abheda bhakti* is the bhakti of total union.

Bhakti is an awareness of the higher nature. When the process of bhakti is started, the object of adoration and you, the person who is adoring, are two different entities. That is



known as bheda bhakti, the bhakti of duality. As long as the bhakti of duality is there, there is separation between you and your maker; you become the supplicant and He becomes the giver. Bhakti has to be used to move from dual bhakti to singular bhakti, where there is total merger.

Sage Vasishtha says, “Rama, use the process of bhakti to move from the dual experience of life to a singular experience of life. From dual identification in life, of yourself being separate from everything else, to a unified and comprehensive experience of life where you become one with everything.” Sri Swamiji has also spoken of this type of attitude and awareness, when he tells us to cultivate atmabhava. He says, “See yourself in everybody else.”

Right now, you are not able to see yourself in everyone else, you see yourself only in yourself. When you cultivate the ability to see yourself reflected in everybody else, that becomes the abheda bhakti, the non-dual bhakti. For example, your son and his friends have taken your car at night and are driving around town. At ten o’clock at night you receive a phone call, “There has been an accident and your child is in the hospital.” You rush to the hospital and run to the bed of your child first, you don’t care about his friends. First you go to your child’s bed, to ensure that your child is all right. You discover that he has only received a tiny scratch and say, “Thank God for saving my child.” The other child, your son’s friend, has broken a leg. You give him sympathy, but there is no care or concern. You see yourself reflected in your child, you feel, “This child belongs to me. I am he, he is me.” You do not have the same sentiment for the other child who has a broken leg, and you provide him only with sympathy, “Oh you poor little thing, I hope you get well soon.” Your main care and concern is your own child.

This is the dualistic behaviour Sri Swamiji talks about which you have to change, by cultivation of atmabhava. Sri Swamiji has given us many sutras to cultivate atmabhava. It is not a philosophy; it is a practical application of a spiritual

realization. You have heard him say, “If you believe that God exists in everyone, including yourself, then when you see a hungry person, recognize that God inside that person is hungry. God is not different from that person. When you see somebody suffering, recognize that God inside that person is suffering. God is not different from that person.”

If you can recognize the given condition of individuals and recognize that God is experiencing that condition through the individual, then atmabhava can be cultivated gradually. You will connect with that person, with your faith and conviction, with an inclination to help, support and uplift. This is a very simple way of worshipping God, you do not have to chant mantras, you do not have to sit in front of a statue or photo and say, “God, God, God.” Look at others and develop the ability to see that divinity within them, by sensing what they are experiencing. If they are suffering, you know that God is suffering, and make the arrangements to make God happy. If God is hungry, feed Him and make God within that person happy. If the person is thirsty, give him something to drink and make God within that person happy. This is the cultivation of atmabhava which Sri Swamiji speaks about, time and again, to remind us, “Lift yourself from this concept of duality, and connect with everyone.” Those who have controlled their senses are the ones able to transcend duality in life.

Bhakti is part of a progression, with respect to all the other things that I have mentioned. It is not something that you can attempt first, there is a sequence. If you have to go from this end of the room to the other, you will have to walk the distance; you cannot make yourself appear at the other end.

Swadhyaya

After bhakti comes *swadhyaya*, the study of scriptures and good books to acquire a better understanding and knowledge. The mind has to be purified by understanding the knowledge and wisdom that gives you spiritual inspiration.

Thus, in order to overcome the identification with the limited mind and ego and to identify with the transcendental, expansive nature, the process has been outlined as follows. From thought improve your action, from action improve your habits, from habit improve your character, by developing a good character improve your destiny. Practise pranayama to control the fluctuations of the mind, to vitalize yourself and to activate the life force. To overcome the environment of duality and separation, bhakti through the cultivation of atmabhava is the way. To uplift your mind and awaken wisdom, practise swadhyaya, study of scriptures.



The Practical Path of Perfection in Life

27 March 2012

Before we continue with the description of the practical teachings of Sage Vasishtha to Sri Rama, remember one important point: in the gurukul when Sri Rama was studying under his guru, he had also studied and mastered yoga along with other topics. Therefore, in the sequence of the description of the yogic teachings, Sage Vasishtha is not instructing Sri Rama on how to perform the practices. He is only saying that these are the practices which can be used to come out of the state of despondency and to regain balance in life.

If somebody who knows yoga comes to me and says, “What can I do to alleviate this problem?” I will not teach him to hold the right nostril with the thumb, or move the wrist in such and such manner. I will say, “Practise asana and pranayama”, knowing that the person knows that subject and the practices. Therefore, Sage Vasishtha is not telling something new to Sri Rama, he is only identifying those systems or practices of yoga which are applicable in the removal of the state of despondency, depression, despair and hopelessness that Sri Rama is experiencing. A mental condition has altered the perceptions of Sri Rama; therefore, Sage Vasishtha has given management of mind as the main topic. He describes various methods by which one can calm the agitations of the mind, relax the movement and dissipations of the mental vrittis.

Timeless philosophy and practices

In different ages, the sages who have come forward to propagate the teachings of yoga, have always maintained the same sequence of practices. The same ideas and concepts have been given, which indicates that the concepts, practices and philosophy of yoga did not go through changes over time. Although it was propagated and presented by different rishis and sadhus in different times and ages, the classical and the traditional system of yoga remained the same. It was not like the environment today where everybody is making their own 'yoga pill'. It was a different mentality.

Today, by reading a book, people become yoga teachers and create their own style of yoga. In this generation, fifty different styles have come up in the world, each one claiming to be the master. However, when one looks at the tradition and history of yoga, many great exponents and masters have emerged, yet nobody has added or taken anything out from this body of yoga. The yoga of Vasishtha is not different from the yoga that we are practising today. The yoga of Vishwamitra is not different from the practices and the understanding that we have today. The hatha yoga of Swatmarama and Gheranda are exactly the same as they were in the past. The concepts of bhakti yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga and kundalini have remained unchanged since time immemorial. This indicates continuity in the tradition of yoga because the teachings are timeless. Those who can understand this should make the effort to maintain the continuity of the classical teachings of yoga without any modification or change.

Sri Swami Satyananda, our guru, was very clear in this matter. He researched into yoga and brought forth the ancient techniques, teaching them to us in a modern context. History will recognize him as the founder of yoga in this century, just as Patanjali, Swatmarama, Gheranda and Vasishtha were recognized. Sri Swami Satyananda also shines in the galaxy of these brilliant bright stars as a rishi, as a person who maintained the continuity of the classical systems and the traditions of yoga, yogic life and yogic science. The



simplicity of his instructions, his intuitive ability to know what is needed by people and the simplicity with which he presented it is truly amazing.

The intellectuals make a simple idea into a big, complex philosophy. However, if you eliminate the dross of the philosophy, if you remove the covering from the philosophy, you will discover that the essence of yoga has always remained the same throughout the ages, no matter whether it started twenty thousand years ago, five thousand years ago or fifty years ago. Why should the concept of yoga change? The mind has not changed, emotions have not changed. The trouble that our ancestors had with the management of their mind is the same trouble that we are facing today in our life. The statement of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* regarding the mind applies even today. He says to Sri Krishna (6:34), “How can I manage these dissipations of the mind? It is easier to control the flow of air than to contain the movement of the mind.” The same sentiment is being expressed by Sri Rama, and the same sentiments are expressed when you talk about your difficulties and problems to your gurus.

The mind has been the same throughout the ages, through generations; emotions have been the same throughout the ages, through generations; situations have been the same throughout the ages and through generations. Therefore, the application of yoga is perennial.

In all the yogic traditions and scriptures we are taught to look at yoga in relation to the total human personality, otherwise it has no relevance and meaning in your life. Swami Sivananda propagated the yoga for the head, heart and hands. It was his understanding of the yogic process. He did not say that hatha yoga is the last and the first. He said that every yoga complements the development of human nature; every yoga nurtures the flowering of human creativity. Therefore, the practices of yoga should be integrated and this is what we are seeing in *Yoga Vasishtha* as well.

Prana vidya

When Sri Rama is confronting the depressions, conflicts and turmoil of his mind, what are the instructions being given by Sage Vasishtha? Exactly the same instructions that we give in the ashram. You have read and heard Sri Swamiji when he has spoken about prana as prana shakti and chitta shakti. Everybody thinks of prana as vitality, but Sri Swamiji defined the external and the subtle expressions of prana as prana and chitta, and the same has been defined here. Sage Vasishtha is saying to Sri Rama, “Rama, first know, cultivate, understand and develop the knowledge of prana.” The first instruction of Sage Vasishtha in relation to prana is on prana vidya, not pranayama.

The system of prana vidya is presented in *Yoga Vasishtha*. Sage Vasishtha speaks of prana and apana, and the necessity of the union between the two. He says, and it is the modern yogic concept also, “*Prana* is an upward-moving flow, *apana* is a downward-moving flow. When these two move away from each other, dissipation, ill-health and imbalances of mind take place. Therefore, with the knowledge of prana vidya, make the attempt to join prana and apana together.”

Thousands of years later, Krishna also said the same thing in the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:27): *pranapanau samau kritvaa* – “Bring these two forces together, do not allow them to dissipate.”

In the description of prana vidya and the functions of prana, Sage Vasishtha also speaks of kundalini yoga, chakras and the corresponding states, “When the pranas are balanced and united, when prana and apana join together, then the kundalini rises.” Prana and apana, the upward-moving flow and the downward-moving flow, are usually like two magnets held in opposite directions, and they repel each other. If you hold two magnets in the reverse order, they repel each other. There is no union at that point and the mind becomes extroverted. The mind does not identify with the feeling of peace. It does not identify, experience or nurture *shanti*, peace. Peace is only attained when there is no repelling of the pranas; rather, the magnets have been turned towards each other and they come together without any effort. When these pranas come together, it becomes possible for the kundalini to rise from mooladhara to sahasrara. In this process, you go through the various stages of realization where you begin to discover your true nature.

Sage Vasishtha is instructing Sri Rama in relation to the management of the pranas, in the system of prana vidya, in the practice of pranayama, in the theory and understanding of kundalini and the chakras. The same description is given to us by Sri Swamiji in the book *Kundalini Tantra*.

Bhakti yoga

Sage Vasishtha continues to describe the process that one has to become aware of after the practice of pranayama. This is in relation to the condition of Sri Rama. He says, “Through the practices of prana vidya, pranayama and knowing the processes of the kundalini and chakras, you attain the tranquillity and stillness in the pranas where there is no external dissipation; your pranas do not repel each other and the mind is fixed. Then you come into the practice of bhakti yoga.”

Bhakti yoga will cultivate *dharana*, concentration, one-pointedness of the mind. Through the practice of bhakti yoga, you can raise yourself above the understanding of duality and begin to experience the transcendental nature in each and every thing. He defines bhakti in two forms: *bheda bhakti*, bhakti where you as the worshipper and the object of your worship, your *ishta devata*, are two different entities; *abheda bhakti*, when differences do not exist between you and your ishta devata and you become one with that.

To illustrate this principle, Sri Swamiji told me a story a long time ago. The story is of two dolls: one made of cloth and the other made of sugar. These two dolls were living in a house. A child who wanted to play brought them beside a well and put them on the rim of the well. Both dolls looked into the depth of the well and saw that there was water down there. They had never experienced water, so they decided to take a dive to experience water. The wind became their friend and with its help, the dolls pushed themselves into the well and fell in the water. One became wet and sank to the bottom. The other became wet and simply dissolved.

Both dolls experienced water, but the doll made of cloth, despite being submerged in water, maintained its own form, shape, identity and colour. Although it was immersed in water it had its own identity. The other doll made of sugar, simply dissolved. It lost its identity. It became one with water. It was different in the beginning, but when it fell in the water, it simply merged and dissolved. This is the example of *abheda bhakti*. In *bheda bhakti*, dualism is experienced: me and my master. You can immerse yourself in your master, but maintain your individuality. In *abheda bhakti*, you simply dissolve into the master, God, and that is the end, the completeness. Your nature becomes the nature of the container, the water. You are contained in the water and your nature, character, trait becomes that, you become that.

Practice of remembrance

In order to perfect bhakti, whether bheda or abheda, the best method is remembrance, not japa. Japa is very difficult. You cannot hold your mind steady when you are doing mantra japa. The mind shifts from one thing to another, and you have to struggle to pull it back. However, the memory can be constant and be a part of your normal daily activity. While you are driving, eating, sitting, watching television, reading the newspaper, doing anything and everything, you can maintain the memory, *smarana*.

It is similar to remembering and maintaining the memory of your child who is in a foreign land. You do not connect with your child by continuously repeating the name of the child. You connect with the child through your remembrance. Whenever the remembrance comes, the same sentiments, emotions and love is felt, irrespective of whether he is close to you or far away from you. Your sentiments are the same regardless of the distance.

Disciples cultivate such abheda bhakti with their guru. Sri Swamiji always says, “Swami Sivananda is with me all the time. I talk to him, he talks to me.” I am having glimpses of this experience. Sri Swamiji is not with us physically; however, I can feel his presence, I can talk to him, he talks to me. Three years ago I was not able to do this, but today I am able to. It is not an achievement or a siddhi, it is the deepening of a connection; it is remembrance. That is the bhakti which Sage Vasishtha talks about to Sri Rama.

Knowledge and wisdom

Furthermore, Sage Vasishtha says that you have to protect the innocent and pure seed of your sentiments through knowledge and studies, *swadhyaya*, and try to eliminate all doubts through contemplation and reflection.

Sage Vasishtha says there are two methods for the transformation of the mind: yoga and jnana. Through yoga you are able to stop the movement of the mind and through jnana you can perceive the reality as it is. You can identify

with reality and not with falsity, not with things that are transitory or impermanent in nature. The word *jnana* is often translated as either knowledge or wisdom. Knowledge can only be intellectual, whereas wisdom is applied knowledge. Knowledge which you apply in your life in a practical way is wisdom; the knowledge which you store in your mind and lock up in your intellect is only knowledge. What you understand through your intellect is not wisdom, it is knowledge. When you apply that knowledge in your life and live according to that knowledge, it becomes wisdom, it becomes common sense. However, common sense is something that is very uncommon in this world!

Sage Vasishtha says, “The accomplishment of yoga is the abidance of the individual self in the Higher Self, you live in that higher reality. That is the accomplishment of yoga.” This higher reality is not the religious concept of higher reality, ‘the God in heaven’, but the transcendental form of your existence, the realization of that. Just as you are aware of your limited self, when you become aware of your transcendental Self, this limited self abides in the transcendental Self.

For example, you dream at night and that dream for you is absolutely real. Somebody is chasing you, you are afraid, you are fearful, you are running, you are sweating and your heart is palpitating. The dream is as real as if you were experiencing it in the waking state. Your pulse is beating fast, the respiration rate is fast, you are sweating, there is intense fear, you are trying to run away from the situation, but your legs seem to be glued to the floor and somebody’s arm is coming to grab you from behind. From this state of deep fear, when you wake up and realize, “Oh it was only a dream, thank God!” When you are abiding in the dream state it is real, but when you wake up, the dream state becomes unreal and the waking state becomes real.

In the same manner, according to Vedanta, our identification with our individuality is unreal. According to *Yoga Vasishtha* also this identity is unreal, as it is only a temporary involvement of the senses with the sense objects: with pleasures, comforts,

with everything that you are craving. When you are awakened in your transcendental nature, you begin to feel that this life is nothing but a dream. You move through many different dreams. Which is real? Each one is real because you identify with each one at that particular moment; however, when you are awake all those dreams cease to exist and you are aware of this reality. Therefore, the purpose of yoga is that the individual self abides in the Higher Self. That is the culmination of yoga. Before you come to this point of culmination, you have to interact with the world.



Karma yoga

You must live your karmas. You have to live your destiny. You have to live your samskaras. You have to go through the path, the journey, which starts from point A and goes on to point B. This movement from point A to point B is called 'evolution' or the 'forward movement of life'. In this evolving life you cannot shun karmas. However, you can better understand your karmas. Rather than reacting to karmas, you can respond in a positive and creative way to your karma. Reaction is unconscious, response is conscious. Reaction is unplanned, response is well-considered. In this manner, Sage Vasishtha describes the process of karma yoga.

While you are engaged in your karmas, try to improve your performance, efficiency and creativity to overcome the pitfalls of the 'loss or gain' attitude that you associate with a karma. Respond consciously to a karma and do not react unconsciously. In a nutshell, this is the theory of karma yoga that Sage Vasishtha gives to Sri Rama to remember. He says, "When you are able to respond in the appropriate manner to the karmas, then liberation takes place." He does not say that meditation becomes the path of liberation. He says, "Proper understanding and response to the karmic situation makes us liberated. Therefore, O' Rama, do not avoid your participation and involvement with karma."

The entire concept of karma and karma yoga has been defined by Sri Swamiji in the most beautiful manner. He says, "Realization is not escaping from life and shunning karmas, but running into life with arms open to embrace all the karmas." Always remember this sutra, this statement.

In order to find peace and happiness, there is no need to renounce, avoid or shun anything, unlike what many people believe. They say, "I have to now avoid karmas. I have to detach myself from karmas. Therefore, I am not going to do any karma whatsoever." Sri Swamiji has given the opposite idea. He says, "Negation of karma will not transform your karmas at all. Rather, understanding of the karma and running into life with open arms to embrace the karmas is what is going

to liberate you in the end.” Meditation can only give you a momentary and fleeting glimpse of what lies beyond the mind. However, you cannot stay there, your karmas and *vasanas*, desires, pull you back down, your family pulls you back down, your problems pull you back down, your profession pulls you back down and your difficulties pull you back down.

Somebody was telling me that after practising yoga they are in a state of peacefulness, but then they have to go to the post office and bank and interact there. Things pull you down and you have to change your whole perception to again relate with what is happening all around. You cannot maintain that meditative state all the time. These are the practical difficulties of life. Both Sri Swamiji and Sage Vasishtha say, do not worry about it. Do your karma as your dharma to know and understand everything, just as a doctor can treat hundreds of patients with the same awareness, objectively. The moment the doctor becomes subjective, he will lose his identity of a doctor. In the same manner, if you can maintain your objectivity of the karma you can be a karma yogi, but if you become subjective towards the karmas, you lose the plot of karma yoga.

When you have realized what your dharma is through karma yoga, and you are free from the influences and reactive nature of karma, then you are liberated. Once you are liberated, there is no return to ignorance. You continue to live in this world, but as an enlightened being, not as an ignorant being. Thus, the sequence which has been given by Sage Vasishtha starts with prana vidya, pranayama, chakras, kundalini, swadhyaya and meditation to overcome the ego of the body and the ego of the mind. Then engage in karma again, and through karma find the ultimate happiness and the final realization.

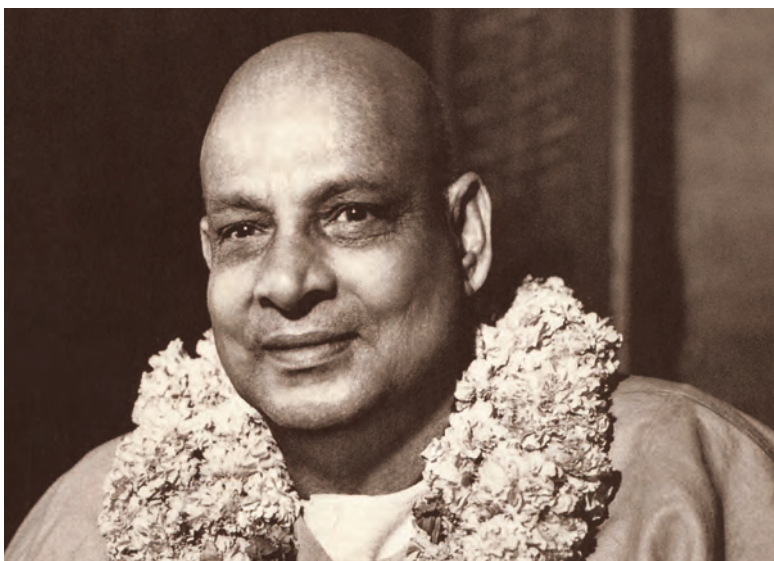
The eightfold paths of Patanjali and Sivananda

Sage Patanjali developed the eightfold system of yoga: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, leading to samadhi. What do you see in this sequence? All

the eight limbs are intended to train a person to come to a state of equipoise, awareness, understanding and realization. In all the eight stages, you are working with yourself. You are chipping away the sharp edges of your nature and personality. You are removing the extra bits that are on the rock to allow the statue to manifest, which is inherent in the rock. You are working with yourself right until the state of samadhi.

In samadhi you cop it, and come to the pearly gates of heaven. There you meet Saint Peter, and he says, "What are you doing here?" You say, "Well, I have earned my right to live in the kingdom of heaven." Saint Peter asks, "Why?" You say, "I have attained samadhi, I have realized myself, I know that me and my Father are one. I have gained the right to live in this kingdom." Saint Peter conveys this message to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit says, "He might have attained samadhi, but he has been very selfish all his life. He has only worked for his welfare out of greed and selfishness. Samadhi was his selfishness. To come to the kingdom of heaven was his greed. He has not yet become selfless. He has followed the system of Patanjali, and I agree that he has chipped away all the extra bits and has become a statue, but now he is showing that off. He is saying, 'Look how beautiful I am. I am superior to everybody else.' Send him back! And tell him to learn the yoga of Sivananda." Saint Peter says, "What do you mean?" The Holy Spirit, in his ethereal, smoky form says, "Patanjali teaches the yoga of personal transformation, that is the first stage. Swami Sivananda teaches the yoga of reconnecting with the world after having transformed oneself. That is the last stage."

What is the eightfold path of Swami Sivananda? After samadhi, start with serving. What does 'serve' indicate? Service means you again become active in the world, but this time as an enlightened being, not as an ignorant fool who only cares for himself. You become active in the world as an enlightened being whereby everyone's needs become your needs. Swami Sivananda begins with a simple precept. Just as Patanjali speaks of 'yama', Swami Sivananda speaks of 'seva'. Patanjali



speaks of 'niyama', Swami Sivananda speaks of 'love'. Through service, embrace the whole world into your love and sentiment of oneness. Do not isolate yourself from anybody, connect with everybody; bring light into the life of everyone.

Patanjali speaks of 'asana', Swami Sivananda says 'give'. Until samadhi you have been receiving, wanting and desiring. You have attained your wealth, now start giving. Patanjali speaks of 'pranayama', Swami Sivananda says 'purify'. Through giving you are able to remove every remnant of the dross from your life and you can purify yourself. Patanjali speaks of 'pratyahara', Swami Sivananda says 'do good'. Your responses are now conscious responses, appropriate responses; your understanding is based on dharma and *nyaya*, the spiritually correct way. Therefore, do good. Previously you did not have that understanding. When you do good, you will be good, and the goodness will flower within you, it will illuminate you from inside. When Patanjali speaks of 'dhyana', Swami Sivananda says, 'meditate'. Meditation comes forth once again; however, this time it is not for a selfish purpose, but with the realization that God pervades

the entire nature. Finally, Patanjali speaks of ‘samadhi’ and Swami Sivananda says, ‘realize’. They are the same.

**Patanjali's
eightfold path**

Yama
Niyama
Asana
Pranayama
Pratyahara
Dharana
Dhyana
Samadhi

**Sivananda's
eightfold path**

Serve
Love
Give
Purify
Be Good
Do Good
Meditate
Realize

Patanjali represents the personal aspect of self-transformation and Swami Sivananda's yoga represents the expression of that yogic attainment in practical life. This is also the advice which Sage Vasishtha gives to Sri Rama, “Attain your completeness, fullness in yoga, know everything to be impermanent. Know how to separate the wrong from the right, the appropriate from inappropriate, the bad from the good, the positive from the negative, the rational from the irrational, and identify with sattwa. Establish yourself in this path of yoga. Once you are established in the path of yoga, again engage yourself in the world, do not isolate yourself from the world.”

Sri Rama says, “Guruji, I have understood what you are trying to tell me, and I will make that effort.” And in the course of his life, Sri Rama did make that effort and attained the perfect equilibrium. He faced many crises and difficulties in his life; however, he maintained his equipoise, clarity and focus at all times. It is because of this attainment of yoga in his life and his interaction with society with greater understanding, that he is today recognized as ‘maryada purushottam’.

Purusha means person, *uttam* means the best. Therefore, *purushottam* means the best type of individual, the best type of person, who is an example to emulate. When ‘maryada’ is

added before puroshottam, it becomes maryada puroshottam, meaning one who knows the boundaries of appropriateness, and who never crosses those boundaries of appropriateness to create any discord within oneself or in anybody else's life.

The application of the teachings of Sage Vasishtha made Sri Rama an idol and a hero, and he continues to be the inspiration for all people in the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Not because he is God, not because he is considered to be an avatara, but because he became the perfect human being. This is the message of *Yoga Vasishtha*, and you can receive it as the prasad of this Navaratri: how to become the best person that you can be, your perfect self, and apply the principles of Sage Vasishtha in your life. You may not develop perfection in one day, but remember that the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. If you take that first step, you are the achiever, and you are the winner.

Hari Om Tat Sat





“The application of the teachings of Sage Vasishtha made Sri Rama an idol and a hero, and he continues to be the inspiration for all people in the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Not because he is God, not because he is considered to be an avatara, but because he became the perfect human being. This is the message of Yoga Vasishtha: how to become the best person that you can be, your perfect self, and apply the principles of Sage Vasishtha in your life.”

The Yogadrishti (Yogavision) series of satsangs consists of discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati in Munger as part of the new phase of sannyasa life that he has embarked upon since 2009.

The yoga of Sage Vasishtha was the theme of the satsangs Swamiji gave in March 2012 at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth. The Yoga Vasishtha is a treatise in which Rishi Vasishtha instructs Sri Rama on how to overcome his depression and actively engage in the world while remaining unaffected by it. Selecting the key discussions, Swamiji explains how this ancient work provides fresh motivation and positivity to manage the challenges of daily life, while cultivating deep spiritual wisdom and perfection in action. He deals with the subject in a clear, step-by-step manner, making it easy to comprehend and applicable to the lives of all.



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